



The Bulletin Board



NEWSLETTER OF

CITIZENS FOR EDUCATIONAL CHOICE

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Special Legislative Session Called No Honeymoon for New Governor!

Given the "state of the state," Louisiana's new governor John Bel Edwards had a short-lived honeymoon following his January 11 swearing-in. His administration appointees were hardly in their seats when he issued the call for a special legislative session beginning Feb. 14 to address the state's \$1 Billion revenue shortfall in the current 2016 fiscal year.

Legislators arrived for the three-week session to find that proposed fixes included further cuts to state department budgets, revenue raising measures that included new taxes and elimination or reduction of tax credits and rebates, and structural changes to move away from the temporary patches that haven't worked.

Among the 144 Senate and House members called to Baton Rouge for the session nearly a third were newly-elected and just beginning their first term. In their hasty "on the job" training they were having to find their way through the maze of legislative definitions and rules, government acronyms, and statutory and discretionary budget items while at the same time having to resolve the fiscal crisis.



Two-thirds of the state budget is constitutionally dedicated, limiting the parts that can be cut, and this dedication includes the state's public school funding formula (MFP). So with respect to state funding of approved nonpublic school programs we believe any reductions should be off limits.

CEC staff continues to be on the scene at the State Capitol monitoring, testifying and advocating on bills affecting private school funding. It's a matter of tax equity and recognizing the enormous savings to the state that private and public schools render.

As this newsletter goes to the printer lawmakers find themselves inside the proverbial "political sausage factory." We'll post on our website after the session ends the relevant actions that were taken.

When the gavel does sound to end the special session, it will be only days later that it will pound again on March 14 to open the Regular Session. The battle will start over when lawmakers take up the FY 2017 budget that runs July 1, '16 to June 30, '17 and has a projected \$2 Billion deficit. Here we go again! ■

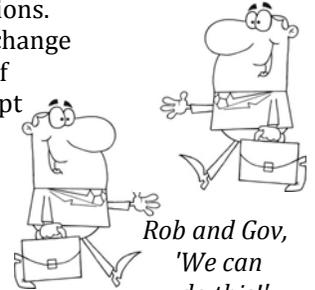
Reminder! Take your Louisiana Income Tax Tuition Deduction

Under Louisiana Revised Statute 47:297:10, those with children in private and parochial schools who file Louisiana income tax returns are allowed a deduction for tuition and other qualifying expenses. Don't forget to take advantage of this benefit for the 2015 tax year. The statute appears somewhat vulnerable for 2016 given the state's fiscal condition. ■

A Conversation with Governor John Bel Edwards

Prior to the runoff election for governor, CEC executive director Rob Tasman visited with then candidate John Bel Edwards to discuss with him more in-depth his views on educational choice and state funding allocations for private and parochial school programs. It was well known that he was endorsed by the state's public school teachers' unions.

It was a cordial and honest exchange in which he promised that if elected he would not attempt to eliminate the *Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence* program (familarly,



the statewide scholarship program) although

he did wish to make some modest changes. Specifically, in his opinion, the "failing school" that a scholarship student would otherwise attend should include those rated D or F only, not those with a C rating.

Also, he reiterated his concern regarding the constitutionality of the *School Tuition Organization* (STO) program which he voiced while serving in the House when the legislation was debated. However, it should be noted that similar STOs operate without interference and very successfully in other states.

Since being sworn in, Gov. Edwards honored our request that one of his three gubernatorial appointees to the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education be someone from the private and parochial school sector. Every governor has done this since BESE was instituted in the 1970s. He named Thomas Roque, superintendent of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Alexandria. Our thanks to Gov. Edwards.

According to Rob, "During his term as a member of the Louisiana House of Representatives, we had the opportunity to work with then Rep. Edwards and developed a very amicable relationship. We are fortunate to have the respect of and accessibility to this new governor and his administration which will help as we continue to advocate strongly on behalf of private and parochial schools in Louisiana." ■



A quick and easy way to influence how your legislator votes is by subscribing to the  votervoice advocacy alert system. To sign up visit our website at www.louisianacec.org, click the link to *votervoice* and follow the instructions. When your help is needed on a particular bill you will receive an email alert with a suggested message that you may use or edit to advocate on an issue affecting private and parochial schools. At times your influence will be critical. Thank you! To learn more about CEC and the nonpublic school programs we advocate link to this page on our website www.louisianacec.org/aboutus.cfm. ■

Is your CEC Membership up-to-date?!

Enclosed with this newsletter is the current 2015-16 CEC Membership Roster. If your school or parent club hasn't joined yet this year please do so. A membership card is provided. As a reminder the membership year runs concurrently with the school year (July 1 to June 30). Thank you for your support!